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Office of the Director of Central Intelligence

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SUBJECT: Unclassified Paper on Nicaraguan
Military Buildup

Attached you will find an unclassified
paper on the Sandinista military buildup that
the DCI promised to Deputy Secretary Dam at last
Friday's luncheon.

Hope this helps.

Cheers!

STAT

SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR
INTERDEPARTMENTAL AFFAIRS

Attachment:
As Stated

19 November 1984

NICARAGUA MILITARY BUILDUP

Talking Points

The Sandinista military buildup has greatly accelerated over the past year, causing increased concern not only in Washington, but also in the Central American region itself.

- Even without the delivery of MIG-21's, the recent direct shipment of the sophisticated MI-24 helicopter gunship by a Soviet ship was unprecedented and undoubtedly represents a Soviet decision to play a more direct role in strengthening the Sandinista regime.
- This year Soviet Bloc deliveries to Nicaragua of military goods is up some 25% compared to last year, and could reach some 15,000 tons by year's end, because at least five more Soviet ships are currently en route to Nicaragua.
- Until the recent MI-24 delivery, the Soviets generally preferred to leave the shipment of major weaponry, such as tanks and artillery to surrogates, such as Cuba and Bulgaria. Soviet cargoes generally included such military-related items as MI-8 transport helicopters, military trucks, field kitchens, and mobile workshops.
- Thus the recent Soviet delivery, which also included minesweepers and goods still not identified, signifies a new departure by Moscow, and we are now forced to monitor all potential Soviet arms carriers closely.

The Sandinistas like to justify their continued military buildup as purely defensive. They cite the threat of US intervention and the US-supported counterinsurgency to justify the acquisition of new Soviet weaponry. They say their military buildup represents a threat to nobody. The facts speak otherwise. Let's review them.

- The Sandinista buildup began well before there was any anti-Sandinista insurgency, and well before relations with the US deteriorated to the point of military tension.



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- In fact, the military buildup began the moment they took power. The first Cuban military advisers arrived in Managua on July 19, 1979--the very day the Sandinistas celebrated their revolutionary victory.
- Although the US wanted good relations with the Sandinistas, and even offered military aid in addition to extensive economic support, we were largely ignored. Instead, the Sandinistas preferred to align themselves with Cuba, and in late 1979, a secret military pact was signed.
- Cuban arms aid also began to arrive in late 1979, and in early 1980, the first arms agreement was signed with the Soviet Union.
- Nicaraguan military personnel left for Cuba and the Soviet Bloc to begin intensive training on tanks, artillery, and jet combat aircraft.

All this time, the Sandinistas were pretending that they wanted good relations with the US and peace in the region.

- Meanwhile, they were secretly supporting a massive arms flow to El Salvador in support of insurgents there. These arms fueled the so-called insurgent "final offensive" in early 1981.
- Once this offensive failed, and a captured pilot admitted he secretly had flown arms from Nicaragua to El Salvador, the Sandinistas changed their tune. They admitted they had provided arms, but denied they continued to do so.
- Again the facts speak otherwise. While the Sandinistas were protesting their innocence, in early 1981, they allowed the Salvadoran insurgents to set up secret communications facilities in Nicaragua as well as establish their overall military headquarters there.
- These communication facilities continue to operate to this day, assisting in the flow of covert arms and ammunition from Cuba and Nicaragua to insurgents in El Salvador.

Meanwhile, the Sandinista military buildup continued, providing a shield behind which to spread revolution throughout the region.

- In early 1981, the first Soviet tanks and heavy artillery began to arrive. Moscow did not send them directly, however. Instead the arms were shipped via Algeria in an attempt to hide Soviet involvement. Later Bulgaria would assume the role of a Soviet arms intermediary.

-- The anti-Sandinista insurgency did not become a problem to Managua until March 1982. At that time, they proclaimed a state of emergency, which has been extended ever since.

-- Thus the Sandinista military buildup was hardly the result either of a US threat or an active insurgency.

And what is the situation now?

-- Nicaragua has received nearly half a billion dollars in arms over the last five years.

-- It now has the largest active duty military force in Central America--some 60,000 men.

-- With reserve and militia units, the total rises to about 120,000, and the Sandinistas now say they want to arm as many as a million.

-- Furthermore, the buildup has become a definite offensive threat to its neighbors.

-- The Sandinistas now have a force of over 100 Soviet T-55 medium tanks. No other Central American country has any.

-- And the Sandinistas have an artillery force of nearly 200 guns, including Soviet 122 mm rocket launchers, with massed firepower unmatched in the region.

With the largest ground forces in the region, the Sandinistas need only a comparable Air Force to complete their buildup. Thus they have long desired to obtain modern jet fighters, and have made no secret of their determination to get them.

-- They have sent pilots to the Soviet Bloc for training, and they are building the largest combat fighter base in the region at Punta Huete outside Managua.

We are certain that only US demarches have so far prevented the delivery of MIG-21 jet aircraft.

Even though the recent Soviet ship deliveries did not include MIG-21s, they did deliver sophisticated MI-24 helicopter gunships. This devastating weapon is used by the Soviets to hunt down Freedom Fighters in Afghanistan, and it undoubtedly is intended for a similar use in Nicaragua.

-- I would like to point out that Congress has so far balked at the mere suggestion that we provide even less-advanced helicopter gunships to El Salvador.

While this Soviet arms delivery was underway, along with a similar one by the usual Bulgarian route, the Sandinistas were claiming that they were willing to sign a Contadora Peace Treaty.

- But the draft they are willing to sign would almost immediately end the US support to friends in return only for general assurances that the Sandinistas would later agree to limit their military buildup.
- Furthermore, the draft is weak on verification measures to ensure that Nicaragua has stopped exporting revolution and sent home all their Cuban military advisers.
- The Intelligence Community estimates there are some 3,000 Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua, but the Sandinistas have admitted to only some 200.

Thus verification is a problem from the very start.

- And let me assure you that we have completely reliable information that the Cubans are there, even in combat zones close to the Honduran border.
- The Sandinistas have denied this, but we can no longer trust their denials. Just as we know that they continue to support insurgents, not only in El Salvador, but also in Honduras and Guatemala, as well.

What of the internal situation in Nicaragua?

- The Sandinistas have conducted an election in which the largest democratic opposition group refused to participate because of Sandinista restrictions.
- An election in which the major opposition candidate was stoned by a Sandinista mob before the international news media.
- An election in which the two largest independent parties also tried to pull out, but were prevented from doing so by mobs and legal maneuvers.
- An election which a key Sandinista leader labeled as a farce in a secret speech to Nicaragua's Communist Party.
- Copies of this speech, which were smuggled out of Nicaragua, should be must reading for every American, for it shows clearly what the Sandinistas intend to do.
- Their goal is to build a Marxist-Leninist state in Nicaragua--another Cuba in this hemisphere.

The Catholic Church in Nicaragua, despite repression and intimidation, despite mob violence and insults to the Pope himself, despite censorship and forced exile of priests, has remained a steadfast opponent of the Sandinista regime.

- The Catholic Church has opposed the military conscription law in Nicaragua, which forces young men to serve in the Sandinista Party's own Army. Not in a national Army, but in a partisan military force with political commissars, just like in the Soviet and Cuban armies.
- The Catholic Church has also called for a national dialogue and real democracy in Nicaragua. Not just a dialogue only with the parties of the Sandinista's own choosing, but a dialogue that includes the armed opposition as well.
- But the Sandinistas continue to label the anti-Sandinista insurgents as US puppets, despite the fact that US aid has been cut off for over six months.
- Yet the anti-Sandinista insurgents continue to grow in strength despite the US aid cutoff, their ranks swelled by disaffected peasants, repressed Indians, and even the urban youth which has long been the target of Sandinista recruitment efforts.
- Thus the anti-Sandinista now have a force of nearly 15,000 men--the largest insurgency in Central America.
- It is larger even than the one in El Salvador, which has been building for more than a decade.